DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 343 432 FL 020 200

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TITLE Folk Literature in the Foreign Language Classroom.
PUB DATE 25 Oct 91
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Meeting of the Indiana Foreign Language Teachers Association (Indianapolis, IN, October 25, 1991).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Childrens Literature; Drama; *Fairy Tales; *Folk Culture; Grammar; Language Teachers; Legends; Music; Mythology; *Second Language Instruction; *Second Language Learning; Story Reading; *Story Telling

ABSTRACT

The usefulness of various forms of folk literature as grammatical, literary, historical, and cultural sources in foreign language teaching is discussed and guidelines are suggested for classroom implementation. Although the focus is on folk or fairy tales, folk literature is defined to encompass myths, local legends, saints' legends, children's legends, folk songs, sagas, jokes, and anecdotes as well. Answers to basic questions are presented, including why fairy tales should be used to teach a foreign language, what types of grammar can be emphasized, and how writing and oral skills can be developed. Specific fairy tale elements that can be taught include traditional beginnings and endings, the use of numbers, stock characters, diminutives, comparatives and superlatives, gems, and precious metals. Ways to engage a class in story telling are described, based on one teacher's experience while teaching German. Five principles (one-dimensionality, superficiality, abstract style, isolation and a bond with nature's creatures, and sublimation and worldliness) are given that can be used as a basis for interpretation of fairy tales. A sample, unfinished German fairy tale is presented for audience or reader reaction. Contains 24 references. (LB)

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IFLTA Conference
Friday, 25 October 1991
Indianapolis, Indiana

Folk Literature in the Foreign Language Classroom

by Mary Beth Bagg

Introduction

At the onset, allow me to set some parameters for my talk.

•Folk Literature - I chose the term folk literature for this presentation, because I wanted to suggest that this term encompasses many types of prose as well as verse. Included in my definition of folk literature are:

- •fairy/folk tales
- •myths
- •local legends
- •saints legends
- •children's legends
- •folk songs
- •sagas
- •jokes and anecdotes
- •et al.

•**Usefulness of this Literature** - I will discuss the usefulness of these forms of folk literature as grammatical,literary, historical, and cultural sources in general.

•**Focus** - Specifically, I will focus on the folk or fairy tale in this presentation.

•**Bibliography** - I have prepared a bibliography which I hope will prove useful to you should you decide to pursue this field of inquiry.

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Language Usage
Basic Questions to Answer

•Why should we use fairy tales to teach a foreign language?

•Fairy Tales are short.

•Fairy Tales are familiar.

•Fairy Tales are less complex grammatically and syntactically speaking than many other forms of literature.

•Fairy Tales are consistent in style and form.

•Fairy Tales use a rich variety of words.

•Fairy Tales can help build reading, comprehension, and speaking skills.

•**Most importantly** - Fairy Tales are fun, interesting, and appeal to the imagination of virtually all readers.

•On what types of grammar can I focus using fairy tales?

•adjectives - placement, agreement, vocabulary building, diminutives

•tense usages - especially for Spanish and French - rules for passé composé et imparfait/preterito y imperfecto

•the imperfect - German - also known as the narrative past

•How can I help build composition/writing and aural/oral skills?

•summarize familiar tales

•create cloze sentences with adjective or verb answers.

•give only part of an unfamiliar fairy tale to the class and let the students write an ending for it (individual or group exercise)

•have the students modernize a fairy tale

•write scripts and perform a particular tale in class - complete with

props - if they so choose

•students create a fairy tale based on objects and/or pictures, etc.

Note: You cannot always expect that your students can do this immediately. You may need to teach them certain skills, phrases, etc. first - such as how to say *"once upon a time"* in the target language, or how to end one. Teach your students the basic parts of all fairy tales, after you have read one or two together. They will easily be able to identify some themselves.

•traditional beginnings and endings

•use of numbers such as 2, 3, 7, 12 (Of course, if you want to go deeper into this, you can discuss the traditional symbolism of these numbers - Cirlot's *Dictionary of Symbols* is a good source for this information.) ***Twelve**, for example is symbolic of cosmic order and salvation. It corresponds to the number of the signs of the Zodiac and the months of the year. Linked to it are the notions of space and time.*

•***stock* characters** of most fairy tales - i.e., witches, dwarfs, princes, princesses, kings, queens, etc. No specific names unless they are common or generic ones.

•traditional settings for fairy tales - i.e., castles, the forest, journeys through the wilderness, cottages, etc.

•diminutives

•comparatives and superlatives - the youngest, oldest, prettier, uglier, etc.

•gems and precious metals (Cirlot's can help here too! ***Gold** - is the image of solar light and hence of divine intelligence. Gold is symbolic of all that is superior. Everything golden or made of gold tends to pass on this quality of superiority to its utilitarian function.*)

•colors - Snow White - red as blood, black as ebony, white as snow
•magical animals, magical insects
•wishes
•no specific time or place

Demonstration

Ask for objects from audience to use as stimuli for the demonstration. While gathering these to bring up front, discuss the nature or fairy tales as being a narrative form - traditionally oral in nature. Remind the audience how much people love to sit around and tell stories, and that they are often modified and embellished to suit the audience at any given time. This is how fairy tales evolved, as did the art of oral narrative. (NOTE: This activity should not take longer than 10 minutes to do. Watch time element!)

Limited Scope?

If one mentions the words "folk literature," "folk tale" or "fairy tale," we tend to think of this area of literature as a diverse one which is rather limited in scope. In truth, "folk literature" or "folklore" covers a wide range of emotions, live experiences, values, humorous and serious situations, and generally all aspects of life which relate to culture. It embodies what comprises a culture of a people which has been handed down by tradition - usually by word of mouth, though most folklore today is taught and conveyed by means of folk literature, i.e., in written form. It includes "cures and customs, signs and designs, the do's and the taboos of culture. Legends that inspire, tales that terrorize, rhymes to jump rope to — all of these are folklore. Knowing what makes people laugh, what makes them angry, what stirs their pride or their fear is a crucial step toward understanding a

people." (Genelle Morain, U. of Georgia, Athens)

Trouble Talking

Have you ever had trouble getting your students to speak? To string together more than two or three words at a time? To do more than simply parrot back to you the lesson they learned on page -n- in their textbook? Well, why is that? It can't be because we aren't teaching them anything! It cannot be because they somehow magically lose their capacity to speak the minute they walk through your classroom door — or could it? Perhaps that's a way to get your students to open up, make them a part of a fairy tale. One day in an intermediate class I had a devil of a time doing any more than listening to myself speak German and being able to pull out, at best, a couple of words out of each of my students. Perhaps I had started wrongly by asking some questions which I perceived to be totally stimulating like "Was haben Sie am Wochenende gemacht?" or "Welche Kurse belegen Sie dieses Semester?" Well, it was clear after I had asked five or six students, that this simply wouldn't work, so I tried an experiment of sorts (a modification of a chain-story-telling strategy I have used many times in the past). I started chasing an imaginary witch around the room, screaming all the while (in German, of course) about how she would have to restore the voices of all my students or she would be forever condemned to writing adjective ending charts in an intermediate German class such as the one she was in at the time. When it was clear that I had caught the attention of my class, I carried my plan on further and started making up ways in which they could help me regain the full speech capacity which I was certain they had possessed before they had entered my classroom. Each was to, in turn, say a sentence so as to continue a narrative, while the person next to the speaking student was to write that sentence on the board

and a third was to copy it onto a piece of paper while a forth was to try to translate the sentence into English. Yes, as you can imagine, things got pretty chaotic in our room, but, they were speaking, writing, listening to, and translating German. Later, we took our short narrative and embellished it and each week for a month we would add on to it and sometimes modify existing sentences. What we were doing was creating an oral and written folklore for our class complete with the tales of the crazy woman who ran around the room seeking to save the enchanted tongues of the small and helpless children. We had demonstrated what people have done throughout the centuries - tell and retell stories, modifying them and enhancing them with each retelling. Now, of course, this method is not for everyone, nor is it meant for everyday usage. But, it had transformed a group of students who had begun the lesson in semi-catatonic states to a lively and interested bunch. Because tales and legends lie close to the emotions, they make good subjects to stimulate the use of oral language.

Complex or Simple Usage

What is great about fairy tales, for example, is that you can make them as complex or as simplistic as possible depending on the class in which you introduce them. As I mentioned before, they are a great source of vocabulary, syntax, and grammatical structures. They are short enough, in many instances, to keep even the most sleepy-eyed students interested long enough to get to the happy end. Often times, they are available on cassette, if you are interested in having someone else tell the tale in class. *Internationes*, for example, provides several Grimms' Fairy Tales on cassettes. Usually, I find it helpful to let the students listen to the tape through once after having provided them with certain key vocabulary words, then we listen again, this time they should have the text before them. This will

help your students who need that extra aid to understanding.

If you are want to carry the stories beyond the basic understanding of the context, a whole new world is open to you and your students. And some of your students, depending on their particular interests or goals in life may be motivated enough to do some of the work for you. For example, if you've a students who is interested in *criminal justice, or law enforcement* in a German class, you may be interested to know that the punishments found in Grimms' Fairy Tales, and, in fact, in most fairy tales are actually related to Medieval codes of law and punishments. For instance, cases where a subordinate impersonates royalty are always punished by some means of incineration. In *Little Snow White,* the wicked queen is made to dance in red hot shoes until she dies at the close of the narrative. The maid-servant in *The Goose Girl* pronounces her own punishment when asked how a person who impersonated her mistress should be treated. Her answer: "She deserves no better fate than to be stripped entirely naked, and put in a barrel which is studded inside with pointed nails, and two white horses should be harnessed to it, which will drag her along through one street after another, till she is dead." "It is you," said the aged King, "and you have pronounced your own sentence, and thus shall it be done unto you."

You may want to talk about Freud, in simple terms perhaps, and about dreams and dream theory or Jung and archetypical figures - for example, the Political Man, the Wise Man, the Helena Type, Minerva. This is, of course, just scratching the surface of possibilities for psychoanalysis in fairy and folk tales, but it may offer you some ideas for your own classes and/or research pursuits.

Max Lüthi

If all that seems like too much theory for you, here's a simple set of five principles which are easily explained and can be used as a basis for interpretation of fairy tales. These are used as a system of monitoring and interpreting various aspects of the fairy tale which recur in numerous tales. These may be referred to as

Max Lüthi's Five Principles of the Fairy Tale

1. One-dimensionality (Eindimensionalität) - all creatures exist in the same world, thus making it possible for animals and humans to communicate with ease, for example. Mobility from one world to another is easy, one can simply enter the underworld and speak to the dead, the devil, or a witch in a vast underground dwelling.

2. Superficiality (Flächenhaftigkeit) - all things that occur in fairy tales are accepted at the norm, nothing is viewed as unusual. Characters are superficial in their development, they rarely have names, they are usually described by their station in life or, if they do have names, they are commonplace or descriptive of a particular trait or they may be nonsensical (the horse Falada in *The Goose Girl).* Injuries and deaths occur without the gory details smeared all over the page.

3. Abstract Style (der abstrakte Stil) - this involves basic elements in the fairy tale such as colors, numbers, animals, diminutives, precious metals and gems, typical beginnings and endings, castles and cities, the forest, verses and songs, and any other elements one might identify as common to fairy tales.

4. Isolation and a Bond with all of Nature's Creatures - though fairy tale figures often set out on a quest alone or are alone even when surrounded by others, they invariably meet up with benevolent and malevolent figures on route. Natural creatures often become the helpers of fairy tales heroes and heroines.

5. Sublimation and Worldliness (Sublimation und Welthaftigkeit) - much of the inner meaning of the fairy tale is sublimated. Our experiences of the world around us help to let us interpret the tales in terms of daily life in the world of reality.

Work Involved

To use a fairy tale or folk literature in the classroom can take as much or as little work as you choose. It can be as simple or as complex as the class can and wants to handle. The beauty of this form is that virtually anyone can identify in some way with the tales through childhood experiences and the like. It's all up to you - and to your students, should you choose dangle the thread of a story before their noses and then let them complete it, for example.

Bruno Bettelheim *Fairy Tales as Ways of Knowing*

"Beginning in a setting akin to our most ordinary existence, fairy tales take us in a short and dramatic move to the very edge of the abyss, as does any true exploration of the meaning of life, of its deeper purpose, as does any serious effort to know ourselves that penetrates beyond the surface of our being and reaches into the darkest recesses of our mind, particularly into

those to the impact of which we try to close ourselves, which we desire not the recognize.
Fairy tales present to us the essence of beauty in a most concise manner, and in ways in which it can be comprehended even by the most naive peruser of this literature, even by the young child."

The Golden Heart

To close, I will read to you a sample of a fairy tale which a group of my advanced German students created using the "object/picture" method described earlier. The original is in German, but for the purpose of this presentation, these students and I translated the tale into English, retaining the original style as much as possible. Sit back, relax, and let yourselves be children again for a few minutes.

The Golden Heart

Once, a long time ago in a distant kingdom, there lived a baker and his three daughters. The baker had set it his task to teach his daughters the ways of his craft, and in most ways he succeeded famously. One daughter, the eldest, could bake sweet pastries that were so delicious, the smell of them alone could force you to walk a mile to taste them. The middle daughter could bring tears of joy to your eyes with the rolls she baked. The youngest daughter, however could not seem to compete with her elder sisters. Her task was to bake bread, but no matter how often she tried or how she baked it, the bread would turn out black and inedible. Time and time again she would place her loaf

into the oven, and time and time again it would burn and smolder. Finally, after a particularly miserable failure of pumpernickel, the father realized that his youngest daughter would never learn the art of baking. He would need to turn her out on her own. Sad was the baker, as he loved his youngest daughter, but he felt that he could not take time away from his other duaghters who were showing great promise in the baking field. So that day the baker approached his youngest daughter and said: "Daughter, know that well do I love you, but I must ask you to leave and fend for yourself as you have no ability in my art of baking."

"Oh father please!" Give me one more opportunity to show you I can bake bread." And as the baker loved his daughter he relented. Three times more did the youngest daughter put into the oven fresh, uncooked bread loaves, and three times did she pull out burnt and blackened charcoal lumps. Again the father came to his youngest and said: "Daughter I love you well, but I must ask you to leave and fend for yourself for it is apparent that you cannot bake." And as the daughter knew her father was right, she sadly prepared for her journey.

The youngest daughter left her father and her sisters carrying with her only some of the pastries her sisters had baked, and a short belt knife that her father had given her. She walked for weeks in one direction and eventually entered into a new kingdom, never before seen by her. Exhausted from her weeks of walking she laid down to rest in a grassy knoll by the side of the road. Around about the middle of that

night, she was awakened by a loud noise. She arose and tried to find the noise, and after a short time she found a small flower at the base of a hillock, singing. "Boogie down mama, I want your love..." Realizing this strange plant was the source of the relentless noise, the youngest daughter approached the flower with the intention of its sudden and complete transplant. But the flower, sensing this eminent danger, pleaded with the girl and promised to relate to her some valuable information. As the plant had stopped singing, the girl relented and to listened to the plant.

"In a kingdom to the west, there was a Prince who was born with no heart. It was a rich kingdom, and the Prince was its only ruler since his parents have died. But before the king expired, he had cast upon the kingdom a powerful spell, putting all its inhabitants in a deep sleep until such time as the Prince gained a heart. ...

I will end the story here and let you make up your own conclusion. But, as you can see, there is much more to fairy tales and folk literature than meets the eye, and all it takes is a little probing to uncover a rich world of fantasy, imagination, and grammar in your classroom.

Fairy Tale Crimes and Their Punishments

CRIMES	HISTORIC PUNISH-MENTS	FAIRY TALE	MÄRCHEN	COMMENTS
Witchcraft and attempted cannibalism	Death by fire	*Hänsel and Gretel*	*Hänsel und Gretel*	Incineration
Witchcraft and solicited homicide	Death by fire	*Little-Snow White*	*Schneewittchen*	Red-hot shoes
Murder and cannibalism	Drowning	*Little Red-Cap*	*Rotkäppchen*	Wolf = outlaw
Impersonating royalty	Capital: iron maiden	*The Goose-Girl*	*Die Gänsemagd*	Barrel with nails-dragged by horses
Impersonating royalty	Capital: iron maiden	*The White Bride and the Black Bride*	*Die weiße und die schwarze Braut*	Barrel with nails-drawn through town
Impersonation and involuntary servitude	Blinding	*Cinderella*	*Aschenputtel*	
Attempted murder, fraud, and deceit	Capital: iron maiden	*The Three Little Men in the Forest*	*Die drei Männlein im Walde*	Barrel with nails-rolled into water

from: Bottingheimer, Ruth B. *Fairy Tales and Society: Illusion, Allusion and Paridigm.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986.

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Folk Literature in the Foreign Language Classroom

Central States Conference
Indianapolis, Indiana
23 March 1991
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Note: This bibliography is by no means complete, but it should offer a basis for inquiry into the field of folk literature and fairy tales. Have fun!